

Table of Contents

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD	5
TRANSLITERATION TABLE	9
TABLE OF CONTENTS	10
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	31
DEDICATION	34
PREFACE	35
PART I: THE ERA OF THE AMĪR AL-MU'MINĪN, 'UMAR BIN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ	48
His Name, Title, Epithet and Family:	48
His Father:	49
His Mother:	52
Birthdate and place (61 AH, al-Madīnah):	54
"The Mark of the Umayyad Tribe":	54
Siblings:	55
Children:	56
Wives:	57
Physical Features:	58
Factors that Contributed to Shaping 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Personality:	59
Family Life:	59
His Early Dedication to the Pursuit of Knowledge and Memorisation of the Holy Qur'ān:	60
i. Social Environment:	66
ii. His Learning at the Hands of al-Madīnah's Senior <i>Fuqahā'</i> (Jurists) and Scholars:	67
iii. Knowledgeable Status:	72
PART II: 'UMAR DURING THE CALIPHATE OF AL-WALĪD BIN 'ABD AL-MĀLIK:	75

The Shūra (Consultation) Council of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz: A Committee of the Ten Jurists of al-Madīnah:	77
The Unfortunate Incident of 'Umar's Governorship:	81
The Lesson of Mazāhim for 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz:	83
The Ordeal between 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz and al-Ḥajjāj bin Yūsuf during al-Walīd's Caliphate:	84
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Return to Damascus:	86
'Umar's Advice to al-Walīd to Restrain the Killing Power of His Officials:	87
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's View on Dealing with the Khārijites:	91
Counseling al-Walīd on the Subject of Deposing Sulaymān and Pledging Allegiance to His Son:	91
The Reason's For Sulaymān's Closeness to 'Umar:	93
His Contestation with Sulaymān bin 'Abd al-Mālik over the Latter's Enactment of His Father's Deed:	95
His Contestation with Sulaymān bin 'Abd al-Mālik over Spending:	96
'Umar's Urging Sulaymān to Restore the Rights of the Aggrieved:	97
"I see a world devouring one another..."	97
"These will be your adversaries on the Day of Judgment":	98
Zayd bin Al-Ḥasan bin 'Alī and Sulaymān:	99
THE CALIPHATE OF 'UMAR BIN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ:	102
'Umar's Approach to Administering the State According to His First Sermon:	107
Adherence to the Qur'ān and <i>Sunnah</i> (Prophetic Tradition): ..	112
The Presence of Shūrā (Consultation) within 'Umar's State: ..	115
Justice within 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's State:	119
His Policy on Redressing Grievances:	122
Returning the Illegally Appropriated Property of the Umayyad Family:	126
The Umayyad Family Resort to Calm Dialogue:	132

The Umayyad Family Send 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's	
Paternal Aunt:	133
The Disappearance of Collective Umayyad Resistance:	135
Restoring Rights to their Owners:	136
His Dismissal of All Unjust Governors and Commanders:	138
Compensating All Injustices Committed Against Converts:	141
Relieving the <i>Ahl adh-Dhimmah</i> (Non-Muslims Living under Muslim Rule) from Injustices:	145
The Establishment of Justice for the People of Samarkand:	149
His Approval of Sufficient Proof in Compensating the Aggrieved: ..	153
Lifting Unlawful Taxes:	154
Compensating from the <i>Zakāt</i> (Prescribed Alms):	155
Prohibiting Prodding Animals with Iron Rods and Overburdening their Loads:	159
Fixing the Load of Camels to Six-Hundred <i>Roṭl</i> (a weight equal to approx. 3.202 kg):	159
Equality:	160
Freedoms within 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's State:	165
Intellectual and Religious Freedom:	165
Political Freedom:	167
Personal Freedom:	168
Freedom of Trade and Commerce:	169
PART III: HIS MOST IMPORTANT TRAITS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF REVIVAL	173
His Most Important Traits:	173
His Profound Fear of Allāh, the Sublime:	174
Asceticism:	177
Complete Certainty of Who We Are:	178
This is the <i>Dunyā</i> (World):	178

The End is Near:	178
The <i>Ākhirah</i> (Hereafter) is Everlasting:	179
Humility:	184
Piety:	188
Discipline:	191
Clemency, Forgiveness and Mercy:	191
Patience:	194
Resoluteness:	196
Justice:	198
Invoking and Supplicating to Allāh and Allāh's Answering His Prayers:	200
THE INDICATORS OF 'UMAR BIN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ'S REVIVAL	203
'Umar's Reforms and Acts of Renewal	205
<i>Shūrā</i> (Consultation):	205
Fidelity in Ruling and Delegating Trustees:	206
The Principle of Justice:	208
His Revival of the Principle of Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil: ..	210
The Criteria and Qualities of a <i>Mujaddid</i> (Reviver; Renewer) .	212
He must be known to have sound ' <i>aqīdah</i> (doctrine of faith): .	213
He must be a diligent scholar qualified to issue independent legal rulings:	213
His renewal includes the field of thought and behaviour in society: ..	215
His benefits prevail over the people of his time:	216
The Saying of the Messenger of Allāh (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): "At the turn of every century, Allāh will send a person to rectify the religious affairs of this <i>Ummah</i> "	217
"Allāh will send to this <i>Ummah</i> ..."	219
"At the turn of every century..."	220
Is it a requisite of a <i>Mujaddid</i> for his death to occur before the end	

of the century?.....	221
Is the <i>Mujaddid</i> of the century one person or multiple people?.....	221
The <i>Mujaddid</i> renews "the Religion of the <i>Ummah</i> " and not the Religion itself:.....	222
PART IV: THE IMPORTANCE 'UMAR BIN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ ATTACHED TO THE CREED OF THE AHL AS-SUNNAH: ...	224
<i>Tawḥīd al-Ulūhiyyah</i> (the Oneness of Allāh).....	225
· <i>Du'ā'</i> (Supplication):.....	226
·Thankfulness:.....	230
·Trust:.....	231
·Fear and Hope:.....	232
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Belief in the Most Beautiful Names of Allāh:.....	234
§The Names of Allāh are Eternal:.....	236
§Allāh's Names are ' <i>Tawqīfiyyah</i> '.....	236
§Allāh's Names belong to Him Alone.....	237
1.The Meaning of <i>ar-Rabb</i> (the Lord):.....	238
2.The Meaning of <i>al-Ḥayy</i> (the Ever Living One):.....	239
3.The Meaning of <i>al-Wāḥid al-Qahār</i> (the One, the Subduer):.....	239
4.The Meaning of <i>al-'Alī al-'Azīm</i> (the Highest, the Magnificent):.....	240
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Belief in the Attributes of Allāh, the Exalted:.....	241
1.Being (Self):.....	242
2.The Face of Allāh, the Sublime:.....	243
3.The Power of Allāh, the Sublime:.....	244
'Umar's Prohibition on Taking Graves as Places of Worship:.....	245
The Concept of Faith according to 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz:.....	247
Belief in the Last Day:.....	250
1.The Torture and Bliss of the Grave:.....	251

2.Belief in <i>Mi'ād</i> (Resurrection) and that Allāh Will Come Down to Judge:.....	252
3. <i>Al-Mīzān</i> (Balance; Scales):.....	255
4. <i>Al-Ḥawḍ</i> (The Pool in Paradise):.....	257
5. <i>Aṣ-Ṣirāṭ</i> (The Bridge):.....	258
6. <i>Al-Jannah</i> (Paradise) and <i>an-Nār</i> (Hellfire):.....	260
7.The Believers Will See their Lord in <i>Jannah</i> :.....	262
ADHERENCE TO THE BOOK, PROPHETIC SUNNAH AND THE SUNNAH OF THE RIGHTLY-GUIDED CALIPHS.....	264
Following the Book and <i>Sunnah</i> :.....	267
Adhering to the <i>Sunnah</i> of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs:.....	270
Clinging to the <i>Fiṭrah</i> (Natural Disposition):.....	271
His Position in relation to the <i>Ṣaḥābah</i> (Companions) and the Disagreement between them:.....	271
His Position in relation to the <i>Ahl al-Bayt</i> (Family of the Prophet, (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him):.....	273
'UMAR'S STANCE ON THE KHARIJITES, SHI'ITES, QADARIYYAH, MURJITES AND JAHMITES.....	281
The Kharijites:.....	281
His Stance on the Kharijites Dissent from Him:.....	284
His Dialogue with the Kharijites:.....	285
The Leading Causes for Fighting the Kharijites:.....	297
Returning the Property of the Kharijites to its Owners:.....	297
Imprisoning Kharijite Captives until They Turned Good:.....	297
The Shi'ites:.....	298
The <i>Qadariyyah</i> during the Era of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz:.....	302
The Original Claim of ' <i>Qadar</i> ' in Islām:.....	302
The Emergence of a Succession of Groups and their Contentions in the First Century up until the <i>Qadariyyah</i> :.....	303
The <i>Qadariyyah</i> 's First Appearance:.....	304

'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Stance on Ghaylān ad-Damashqī: ..	307
Affirming the Categories of <i>Qadar</i> (Decree):	311
Knowledge:	312
"Written Down":	313
Will:	314
Creation (Bringing into Being):	315
The Difference between the Terms <i>Qadar</i> (Decree) and <i>Qaḍā'</i> (Fate):	316
Being Satisfied with <i>Qaḍā'</i> and <i>Qadar</i> :	318
The Murjites:	319
The Jahmites:	325
The Mu'tazilites:	332
The Establishment of the Mu'tazilite Sect and the Origin of its Name:	333
The Sub-Sects among the Mu'tazilites:	335
The Role of the Mu'tazilites in Reviving the Doctrines of Former Sects:	335
What did they adopt from the Kharijites?	336
Sentencing a Grave Sinner:	336
Dissidence from Unjust Leaders:	336
The Case of Interpretation:	337
The <i>Qadariyyah</i> :	338
The Jahmites:	339
Negating the Attributes:	339
The Doctrine of the Createdness of the Qur'ān and Negating the Sight of Allāh:	340
The Five Tenets of the Mu'tazilite Teaching:	340
PART V: 'UMAR'S SOCIAL, INTELLECTUAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE:	343

His Social Life:	343
The Attention He Gave To His Family and Children:	343
1. Attaching them to the Holy Qur'ān:	343
2. Imparting Advice to Them:	344
3. Promoting Tolerance and Good Opinion:	344
4. Lenient Behaviour and Intelligent Conversation:	345
5. Being Observantly Just with Them:	346
6. Cultivating Fine Manners and Etiquettes in Them:	347
7. Teaching His Children about Asceticism and Prudence in Life:	348
The Importance He Attached to His Children's Education:	352
1. Choosing a Righteous Teacher and Mentor:	353
2. Outlining the Teaching Programme:	354
3. Outlining the Method of Cultivating Manners and Directing:	355
4. Specifying the Times and Priorities for Teaching:	356
5. Observing the Effects of Teaching:	357
The Results of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Programme on His Children's Education: The Case of His Son, 'Abd al-Mālik	358
1. His Worship and Crying:	358
2. His Knowledge, Legal Insight and Understanding:	359
3. Reminding His Father of Death:	360
4. His Resolve in the Religion and Strength in Executing the Truth:	361
5. His Sickness and Death:	362
His Life with the People:	364
1. His Concern for Reforming Society:	364
2. Reminding People of the <i>Ākhirah</i> (Hereafter):	368
3. Correcting Misconceptions:	369
4. His Disavowal of Tribalism:	372
5. His Objection to Standing in His Presence:	375

6.His Acknowledgment of Virtuous People:.....	377
7.A Poor Egyptian Woman Complains to 'Umar:.....	380
8.His Concern for Ransoming Captives:.....	381
9.Wiping the Debts of the Insolvent:.....	382
10.News of the Blind Captive being Held by the Byzantines:..	383
11.The Iraqi Woman's Daughters were Allocated Money from the <i>Bayt al-Māl</i> :.....	384
12.His Revival of the <i>Sunnah</i> of Welfare:.....	386
13.Enhancing the Wealth of the Needy:.....	388
14.Paying Bridal Dowries from the <i>Bayt al-Māl</i> :.....	388
15.His Attempts to Narrow the Gaps between the Social Classes:	390
16.The Great Sense of Responsibility He Felt Towards All Members of Society:.....	391
17.Spending on the <i>Dhimmī</i> (Non-Muslim Living under Muslim Rule) if He had Reached Old Age but Possessed No Money:	393
18.Eating With People of the Book:.....	394
19.'Umar and Poets:.....	394
20.Being Influenced by Ascetic Poetry and His Relationship with <i>Sābiq al-Barbarī</i> :.....	399
The Qualities of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Social Reform:.....	405
Exemplary:.....	405
Measured and Gradual Change:.....	405
Understanding Human Beings:.....	406
Prioritisation:.....	406
A Clear Vision of His Reformatory Measures:.....	406
His Compliance with the Qur'ān and the Prophetic <i>Sunnah</i> : ..	407
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz and the Scholars:.....	407
1.Their Close Contact with the Caliph and His Strong Determination to Pursue His Programme of Reform:.....	409
2.Their Obligation to 'Umar to Advice and Remind Him of His	

Responsibility:.....	413
3.Their Input in Selecting Officials and Filling Various State Positions:.....	415
Intellectual Schools during the Reign of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz and the Umayyad State:.....	417
1.The School of ash-Shām (the Levant):.....	419
-The Jurist, Qabīṣah bin Dhu'wayb ad-Damashqī:.....	420
-Rajā' bin Ḥaywah al-Filistīnī:.....	421
-Makhūl ash-Shāmi ad-Damashqi:.....	422
-'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz:.....	422
-Bilāl bin Sa'ad as-Sakūnī:.....	423
2.The Madīnan School:.....	424
3.The Makkan School:.....	424
-Mujāhid bin Jabr al-Makkī:.....	425
-Ikrimah, the Servant of Ibn 'Abbās:.....	427
-Aṭā' bin Abī Rabbāh:.....	428
4.The School of Baṣrah:.....	429
-Muḥammad bin Sīrīn al-Baṣrī:.....	429
5.The School of al-Kūfah:.....	431
-'Āmir bin Sharḥabīl ash-Sha'bī:.....	432
-Hammād bin Abī Salamah:.....	433
6.The Yemeni School:.....	433
-Ṭawūs bin Kīṣān:.....	434
-Wahb bin Munabbih:.....	435
7.The Egyptian School:.....	438
-Yazīd bin Abī Ḥabīb:.....	439
8.The School of North Africa:.....	139
VI: THE <i>TĀBĪ'ĪN</i> METHOD OF QUR'ĀN EXEGESIS:.....	441

1. The Qur'ān Explained by the Qur'ān:.....	441
-The Intertextuality of the Holy Qur'ān:.....	441
-Drawing Similar Comparisons:.....	443
-Putting Significance on Interpreting by Context:.....	443
-Clarifying Generalisations:.....	444
-Explaining the General with the Specific:.....	445
-Adequate Interpretation:.....	446
-Clarifying Ambiguities:.....	447
-Showing the Meaning of a Word or Clarifying a Problem:.....	447
2. The Qur'ān Explained by the <i>Sunnah</i> (Prophetic Example):	448
3. The Qur'ān Explained by the Sayings of the Companions:..	453
4. The Arabic Language:.....	459
5. <i>Ijtihād</i> (Independent Judgment):.....	459
THE EFFORTS OF 'UMAR BIN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ AND THE TĀBĪ'ĪN IN SERVING THE SUNNAH:.....	460
1. He wrote to the standing Governor of al-Madīnah to inform his contemporaries:.....	463
2. He wrote to the "Imām of Proof", Ibn Shihāb az-Zuhrī, regarding this matter:.....	464
3. 'Umar aimed his directives at all the people of al-Madīnah:..	464
4. 'Umar did not stop there; he transmitted orders to all countries:	465
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Method and Practice of Documentation:	466
-His good choice of executors:.....	466
-He demanded those who documented the <i>Sunnah</i> to categorically collect the <i>aḥadīth</i> and codify them:.....	467
-He obligated documenters of the <i>Sunnah</i> to discern the genuine narrations from the adulterated ones:.....	469
-His verification of the authenticity of <i>ḥadīth</i> :.....	469
-The fruit of this documentation:.....	470
-The efforts of the <i>Tābī'īn</i> in serving the noble prophetic <i>Sunnah</i> :..	472

-Commitment to the <i>Isnād</i> (Chains of Narration):.....	473
-Engaging in intellectual circles of knowledge:.....	473
-Observance of transmitting <i>Ḥadīth</i> as they heard it:	474
-The development of scientific criteria for praising and criticizing the condition of narrators:.....	474
A CASE STUDY: THE TĀBĪ'ĪN METHOD OF PURIFICATION AND CONDUCT AT THE SCHOOL OF AL-ḤASAN AL-BAṢRĪ. 478	
Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī during the Reign of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz and the Umayyad State:.....	478
The Reasons for His Impression on People's Hearts:.....	480
A Glimpse at the Prophetic ' <i>Taṣawwuf</i> ' ('Mysticism') of Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī:.....	484
-Hardening of the Heart, its Life and Lifelessness:.....	484
Immersing the heart and tongue in much remembrance of Allāh:	486
Profuse Remembrance of Death:.....	489
Visiting the Graves to Reflect on the State of its Inhabitants:..	491
His Insistence on Sincerity, Obedience to Allāh and Self- Reflection:.....	494
Sincerity:.....	494
Obedience to Allāh:	496
Contemplation and Meditation:.....	499
Knowledge and the Scholars:.....	501
His Condemnation of Long-Term Hope and Disapproval of Arrogance:.....	501
Disciples of Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī Famous for their Knowledge of the Path of Longing:	502
Ayyūb as-Sakhtiyānī:.....	502
Mālik bin Dīnār:.....	506
Muḥammad bin Wāsi':.....	508
Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's Disavowal of "Separation":.....	510

The "Just Leader" in the View of Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī:.....	516
Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī Describes the World to 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz: 520	
His Stance on the Revolutions that Happened During His Era: 524	
"How Does a Nation Err with Someone Like This in Their Midst?!" 528	
The Death of Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī:.....	529
CONQUESTS AND LIFTING THE SIEGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE:	531
IX: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPREHENSIVE DA'WAH (INVITING TO ISLĀM)	537
Enacting Laws Dedicated to <i>Da'wah</i> :.....	537
Encouraging Scholars to Openly Spread Knowledge:	540
Directing the <i>Ummah</i> to the Importance of Knowledge:.....	541
Dispatching Devout Scholars to North Africa:.....	541
-Ismā'īl bin 'Ubaydullah bin Abī al-Muhājir:.....	543
-Bakr bin Suwādah al-Jadhāmī, Abū Thamāmah (d. 128 AH): 544	
-Ju'thul bin 'Āhān ar-Ru'aynī al-Qatabānī, Abū Sa'īd (d. 115 AH):	545
-Sa'ad bin Mas'ūd at-Tajībī: Abū Mas'ūd:.....	546
-Talaq bin Ja'bān al-Fārisī:	546
-'Abd ar-Raḥmān bin Rāfi' at-Tanūkhī, Abū al-Jahm (d. 113 AH): .547	
-'Abdullah bin al-Mughīrah bin Abī Bardah al-Kanānī:	548
-'Abdullah bin Yazīd al-Ma'āfirī al-Ḥablī, Abū 'Abd ar-Raḥmān (d. 100 AH):	548
-Wahb bin Ḥayy al-Maghāfirī:	549
His Letters of Exhortation to India's Nobility and Others:	550
Encouraging Non-Muslims to Accept Islām:.....	553
Resolving the Special Case of the Ahl adh-Dhimmah (Non- Muslims living under Muslim Rule):.....	553
FISCAL REFORMS DURING THE REIGN OF 'UMAR BIN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ.....	555
Strict Adherence to the Book and <i>Sunnah</i> :.....	555

Enforcing the Values of Truth, Justice and Expelling Injustice: 556	
'Umar's Political and Economic Goals:.....	557
-Fair Redistribution of Income and Wealth:	557
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Strategies for Realising the State's Economic Goals:	560
-Creating a Sustainable Environment for Growth:.....	560
The restoration of rights:.....	560
Generating regulated economic freedom:	561
-Adopting a New Agricultural Policy:.....	563
Prohibiting the sale of foreign land:	563
Caring for farmers and relieving taxes due on them:.....	564
Revitalising and Cultivating Barren Land:.....	567
'Umar and Mineral Sources:	568
Launching Infrastructural Projects:.....	568
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Fiscal Policy on Revenues:	569
<i>Zakāt</i> (Prescribed Alms):	571
<i>Jizyah</i> (Tax Paid by Non-Muslims Living under Muslim Rule): 574	
<i>Kharāj</i> (Land Tax):	577
' <i>Ushūr</i> (Import and Export Duty):.....	578
<i>Khums</i> (A Fifth of the Spoils of War) and <i>Fay'</i> (Non-War Spoils):... 582	
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Policy on Public Spending:	586
'Umar's Spending on Social Welfare:.....	586
Spending on the Poor and Needy:	587
Spending on the Debtors:.....	589
Spending on Captives:	590
Spending of Travellers and Wayfarers:	591
Spending on Freeing Captives:	592
The Rationalisation of Expenditure in the Interests of the State:.. 593	

-Cutting the Special Privileges of the Caliph and Umayyad Royals:	593
-Rationalising Administrative Expenditure:	595
-Rationalizing Military Expenditure:	596

XI: THE LEGISLATIVE SYSTEM DURING THE REIGN OF 'UMAR BIN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ AND SOME OF ITS JURISPRUDENTIAL RULINGS: 597

Jurisdictions and Testimonies -	597
1.The Personal Characteristics of a Judge:	597
2.The Judge's Ruling on Clear Matters and Referral of Unclear Matters:	598
3.Attention to Temper and Forbidding Punishment whilst in a State of Anger:	600
4.For the Governor to Mistakenly Pardon is better than For Him to be Excessive in Punishing:	601
5.Averting from Doing Something due to Suspicion:	601
6.Giving Gifts to the Heir:	601
7.Revoking Rulings that Contradict Islāmic Legal Texts:	603
8.Whoever Loses Something He has been Entrusted with Must Take an Oath against Carelessness:	603
9.The Effect of the Absence of Evidence on the Postponement of Judgment:	604
10.The Cost of the Lost Camel:	604
11.Freeing the Foundling:	605
12.The Testimony of a Man on behalf of His Brother or Father:	605
Blood and Qīṣāṣ (Legal Penalty of Equality) -	605
1.Giving Parties Whose Pacts have been Contravened on Account of Death the Option of Forgiveness, Blood Money or Death:	605
2.Adjournment until the Deceased's Benefactor Reaches Maturity:	606
3.Pardoning Some Parties Overturns Retaliation:	606
4.Killing After Having Taken Blood-Money:	606

5.The Murdered Person Found in the Marketplace:	607
6.Killing in Over-crowdedness:	607
<i>Diyyah</i> (Blood-Money) -	608
1.The Amount of Blood-Money:	608
2.Blood-Money Expiable on the Tongue:	608
3.Blood-Money Expiable on the Voice and Throat:	609
4.Blood-Money Expiable on the Groin:	609
5.Blood-Money Expiable on the Female Genitals:	609
6.Blood-Money Expiable on the Nose:	610
7.Blood-Money Expiable on the Ear:	610
8.Blood-Money Expiable on the Leg:	611
9.Blood-Money Expiable on the Area between the Eyes:	611
10.Blood-Money Expiable on the Forehead if Dented:	611
11.Blood-Money Expiable on the Chin:	612
12.Blood-Money Expiable on Fingers and Toes:	612
13.Blood-Money Expiable on Nails:	613
<i>Hudūd</i> (Fixed Punishments) -	613
1.The Importance of Upholding the <i>Hudūd</i> :	613
2.Disallowing Retracting the <i>Hudūd</i> after the Imām has Given a Verdict:	613
3.Multiple <i>Hudūd</i> Charges Against One Man:	614
4.No Amputation or Crucifixion without the Caliph's Consent:	614
5.The One Indicted with a False Accusation of <i>Zinā'</i> (Illegal Sexual Intercourse) Must be Muslim:	614
6.On Wavering a Father's False Accusation of <i>Zinā'</i> Against His Son:	616
7.On Falsely Accusing a Christian Woman Who is Married to a Muslim Man:	616
8.On a Woman Accusing a Man of Coercing Her:	617

9. On Amputation for Theft before the Thief Sets Out to Commit Theft:	618
10. A Thief Who Desecrates a Grave Deserves Amputation: ...	618
11. The Punishment of a Second-Time Offender of Drinking Alcohol:	618
12. The Punishment of the Alcohol Server:	619
13. Destroying Alcohol Containers as well as Alcohol:	619
14. On Non-Muslims Taking Alcohol into Muslim Countries:	620
15. The Punishment of the <i>Sāhir</i> (Magician; Practiser of Magic): .	620
16. On Requesting the Apostate to Repent:	621
17. On the Method of Requesting an Apostate to Repent:	621
18. The Punishment of the Female Apostate:	622
<i>Ta'zīrāt</i> (Corporal Punishments) -	623
1. The Maximum Corporal Punishment for Flogging:	623
2. Forbidding Punishing People on Account of Suspicion and Flogging Them Based on Accusation:	624
3. Prohibiting <i>Muthlah</i> (Deformation):	626
Rulings on Prisoners:	627
1. Expediting the Cases of the Accused:	627
2. Concern for the Affairs of Prisoners:	628
3. Women's Only Prisons:	629
Rulings on <i>Jihād</i> (Fighting in the Way of Allāh) -	630
1. The Legal Age of Those Eligible to Participate in Battle:	630
2. On How to Commence Fighting Against Non-Muslims:	630
3. The Duration of <i>Ribāṭ</i> (Fortified Outpost):	631
4. Ruling on the Money of the Combatant Fighting on Horse-Back:	631
5. On Selling Horses to the Enemy:	631
6. Ransoming Muslim Captives Irrespective of Price:	632
7. Ransoming Men, Women, Slaves and <i>Ahl adh-Dhimma</i> : ..	633

8. Despising Killing Captives:	633
On Marriage and Divorce -	634
1. A Woman Marrying Without a Legal Guardian:	634
2. Two Guardians Marrying a Woman to Two Men:	635
3. A Man's Marriage to a Woman after Having Sexual Intercourse with Her:	636
4. Marrying the Wife of a Captive:	636
5. Marrying the Wife of a Missing Person:	636
6. The Dowry of the Divorcee during Her Husband's Illness: ...	637
7. A Man Stipulating Something for Himself on the Occasion of His Daughter's Marriage:	637
8. Playing Around with Divorce is Serious:	638
9. Divorcing Forcedly:	638
10. A Man Half-Declaring His Wife Divorced:	639
11. A Woman Divorcing Herself when the Command is Placed in Her Hands:	639
12. A Woman Submitting to Islām when Married to a <i>Kāfir</i> :	639
13. The Period of Absence from One's Wife:	640
XII: 'UMAR BIN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ'S ADMINISTRATIVE JURISPRUDENCE	642
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Most Prominent Governors:	642
1. Al-Ḥajjāj bin 'Abdullah al-Ḥakmī (Governor of Khorasān and Sajistān):	642
2. 'Udayy bin Arṭa'ah al-Fazārī (Governor of Baṣrah):	644
3. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd bin 'Abd ar-Raḥmān bin Zayd bin al-Khaṭṭāb (Governor of Kūfah):	645
4. 'Umar bin Ḥabīrah (Governor of Upper Mesopotamia):	645
5. Abū Bakr Muḥammad bin 'Amr bin Ḥazm (Governor of al-Madīnah):	646
6. 'Abd al-'Azīz bin 'Abdullah bin Asyad al-Umawī (Governor	

of Makkah):.....	646
7. Rifā'ah bin Khālid bin Thābit al-Fahmi (Governor of Egypt):	647
8. Ismā'īl bin 'Ubaydullah bin Abī al-Muhājir al-Makhzūmī (Governor of <i>al-Maghrib</i> [the western region of North Africa]):	647
9. As-Samḥ bin Mālik (Governor of Andalus [Spain]):	648
'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Insistence on Selecting His Officials from the People of Righteousness and Virtue:	648
Notables Directly in Charge of Managing State Affairs.....	651
Planning in 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Administration:	656
Organisation in 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Administration:.....	658
Safeguarding against Administrative Corruption during the Reign of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz.....	662
1. Increasing the Wages of Officials:	663
2. His Observance of Safeguarding Against Dishonesty:.....	664
3. Banning the Acceptance of Gifts and Offerings:	665
4. Prohibiting Wastefulness and Extravagance:	665
5. Prohibiting Governors and Officials from Trading:.....	667
6. Opening up the Channels of Communication between Governors and Citizens:	668
7. Holding Former Governors to Account over the Funds of the <i>Bayt al-Māl</i> :.....	669
Centralisation and Decentralisation in 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Administration:.....	670
Centralisation:.....	671
Instances Demonstrating the Application of Decentralisation:	672
The Principle of Resilience in 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Administration:.....	675
1. "Do not burden yourself with hastening to us lest you are late in observing the prayer in its appointed time":	679
2. "Why did you not wait until you were not fasting before setting out?"	680

3. "Do not be obstinate towards the people or cause them difficulty and distress":	681
4. Resilience in Dialogue and Understanding:.....	681
5. Intellectual Resilience:.....	682
The Importance of Time in 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Administration:.....	683
The Division of Work in 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Administration:	689
Reasons for the Success of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's Project of Reform.....	692
The Impact of Adhering to the Rules of the Qur'ān and <i>Sunnah</i> on 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's State:.....	694
Characteristics of the Divine <i>Sunan</i> (Laws; Traditions; Ways):..	695
Ruling by What Allāh Revealed has Worldly Implications and Implications in the Afterlife:.....	698
The Worldly Implications that Manifested in 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's State:.....	698
1. Succession and Empowerment:	698
2. Security and Stability	699
3. Victory and Triumph:.....	699
4. Glory and Honour:	700
5. A Life of Blessing and Comfort during His Era:	701
6. The Spread of Virtue and Dilapidation of Vice:.....	702
7. Guidance and Certainty:.....	703
THE LAST DAYS OF 'UMAR BIN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ'S LIFE AND HIS DEATH (MAY ALLĀH HAVE MERCY ON HIM)	708
1. The Last Sermon He Delivered:	708
2. His Poisoning:.....	710
3. 'Umar Bought a Plot of Land for His Grave:	712
4. The Will He Left to His Successor, Yazīd bin 'Abd al-Mālik: .	713
5. The Will He Left to His Children:	714

6.His Will to the One He Entrusted with Washing and Shrouding His Body:.....	718
7.His Dislike for Easing Death on Him:.....	718
8.His State When On the Brink of Death:.....	719
9.The Date of His Death:.....	720
10.The Money that 'Umar Left Behind:.....	721
XIV: THE PEOPLE'S COMMEMORATION OF HIM AFTER HIS DEATH:	723
Maslamah bin 'Abd al-Mālik's Eulogy:.....	723
Fāṭimah bint 'Abd al-Mālik's Eulogy:.....	723
Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's Eulogy:.....	724
Makhūl's Eulogy:	724
Yazīd bin Ḥawshab's Eulogy:	724
The Monk Who Cried Over Him:	725
The King of Byzantium and His Bewilderment:	725
Jarīr's Elegy for 'Umar:.....	727
Muḥārib bin Dathār's Elegy for 'Umar:	727
GLOSSARY:.....	729

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Part One

The Era of the *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz

From Birth to Caliphate -

His Name, Title, Epithet and Family:

His name was 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwān bin al-Ḥakm bin Abī 'al-'Āṣ bin Umayyah bin 'Abd Shams bin 'Abd Manāf, the eminent *Imām* (leader), *Mujtahid* (issuer of independent legal rulings), *Hafīẓ* (one who has committed the entire Qur'ān to memory) ascetic and slave, the true *Amīr al-Mu'mimīn* (Commander of the Faithful), Abū Hafs, the Qurayshi Umayyad, al-Madani (from al-Madīnah) and later al-Maṣri (from Egypt), the rightly guided, pious Caliph and "Ashajj" (the Mark; Scar) of the Umayyad tribe.⁽¹⁾

He was one of the Imāms of *Ijtihad* (the process of independent law-making based on the Islāmic *Shar'ah*)

(1) *Siyar A'lām an-Nubalā'* [The Lives of Noble Figures] (5/144).

and other legal sources)⁽¹⁾ and one of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. He was a person of outstanding morals and ethics, well-rounded, refined, diplomatic and politically-minded who showed a keen interest and passion for justice whenever possible. He possessed extensive knowledge as an acclaimed *Faqīh* (jurist) of unadulterated intelligence and understanding. He was devoutly repentant, consciously God-fearing and upright in his obedience to Allāh. Despite holding the seat of the Caliphate, he remained an ascetic who pronounced the truth with firm conviction to those around him, including the many governors who detested his inquisitions of them, or his deducting their salaries, or repossession of their illegitimate acquisitions. He relentlessly discouraged and punished laxity of morals. In fact, they did not cease to hate him up until the moment he was poisoned, upon which he gained conviction and happiness, not counting his high ranking as one of the Rightly Guided Caliphs in the view of the people of knowledge.⁽²⁾ As for his speech (may Allāh have mercy on him) it was nothing other than eloquent and articulate.⁽³⁾

His Father:

His name was 'Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwān bin al-Ḥakm, a name that acquired a status as one of the finest Umayyad leaders. Courageous and generous, he held the position of Governor of Egypt for more than twenty years. His qualities

(1) *Ibid* (5/114).

(2) *Ibid* (5/120).

(3) *Ibid* (5/136).

of piety and righteousness were so resolved that when he wanted to marry, he said to his assistant: "Collect four-hundred *Dinar* (coins; units of account) of my good money for I want to marry from a household that possesses goodness." He would later marry Umm 'Āṣim, the daughter of 'Āṣim bin 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb (may Allāh be pleased with him), i.e. the granddaughter of the *Amīr al-Mu'minīn*, 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb, whose name it is said was Layla.⁽¹⁾ It is noteworthy to mention here that his marrying into the family of 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb would not have been so, were it not for his upstanding reputation and virtuous character.

Even as a youth, he possessed a remarkably good character as regards his dedication to pursue knowledge and his obvious interest in the Prophetic *Aḥādīth* (sayings). In favour of his own merit, he once sat in the company of Abū Hurayrah and others among the *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions), his study of the *Aḥādīth* continued to excel even after his appointment as Governor of Egypt. Thereupon, he would habitually appeal to *ash-Shām* (the Levant) to send him what they had been informed pertaining to the sayings of the Messenger of Allāh (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) apart from what had been narrated by Abū Hurayrah, since he was already familiar with those.⁽²⁾ Nevertheless, 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's father was the type of person who was accustomed to addressing important

(1) 'Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwān: *Sirāthu wa Athruhu fī Aḥdāth al-'Aṣr al-Umawī* ['Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwan: His Biography and Legacy from the Events of the Umayyad Era], p. 58.

(2) *Siyar A'lām an-Nubalā'* [The Lives of Noble Figures] (474/).

matters, both before and after he became the Governor of Egypt. From the time he entered Egypt, he longed to rule over it and for that reason, he exerted great effort from then onwards to one day meet his aspirations, which he did;⁽¹⁾ in actuality, not only did he assume this position but became one of the finest and most generous Umayyad Governors.⁽²⁾ Every day, a thousand dishes would be prepared and placed around his house, in addition to a further one hundred dishes brought round by the tribes. On the subject of his generosity, he used to say: "If a man allows me to give him something knowing that it is from me, then whatever I have of his is greater than what he has of mine."⁽³⁾

Many a historian has commended his distinct munificence, a quality that was coupled with certainty of faith in the fact that Allāh, the Sublime, bestows sustenance on whosoever He wills. Concerning this he would say: "How strange it is that a *Mu'min* (believer) believes that Allāh provides sustenance to whosoever He wills yet he keeps his money locked away at the expense of great reward and commendation!" In the same manner, 'Abd al-'Azīz was a God-fearing man, which is evident from the last words he uttered while on his deathbed: "I wish I were of no importance. If only I were this free-flowing water or plant in the land of the *Hijāz*!"⁽⁴⁾

(1) *Al-Wilāy wa Kitāb al-Qaḍāh* [Governors and Judges] by al-Kundī, p. 54.

(2) *Mu'jiz al-'Islām* [The Miracle of Islām] by Khālid Muḥammad Khālid, p. 55.

(3) *Abd al-'Azīz bin Marwān*, p. 55.

(4) *Ibid*, p.56; an extract from *al-Bidāyah wa an-Nihāyah* [The Beginning and End] by Ibn Kathīr.

102:1) and began to cry. He then said: "Until you visit the graves" (*ibid*: 2), while the graves are but a visiting place and one must return to either *al-Jannah* (Paradise) or to *an-Nār* (Hellfire)."⁽¹⁾ Some of the positions that illustrate the type of influence the Holy Qur'ān had on 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's personality include:

i. Social Environment:

One's surrounding social environment plays a decisive role in shaping men and building their characters and in this respect 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz lived in an era wherein *Taqwā* (God-consciousness), *Salah* (goodness), a thirst for acquiring knowledge and applying the Book (i.e. the Qur'ān) and the *Sunnah* (Prophetic Example) prevailed. A number of the *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions of the Prophet, (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were still in al-Madīnah, which allowed him to narrate *aḥādīth* (Prophetic sayings) from the likes of 'Abdullah bin Ja'far bin Abī Ṭālib, as-Sā'ib bin Yazīd and Suhail bin Sa'ad who gave him a cup which the Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had drunk from. As for Anas bin Mālik, he said: "I never saw anyone imitate the prayer of the Messenger (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) like this young man", in reference to 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz.⁽²⁾ In this manner, residing in al-Madīnah as part of that society had an

(1) *Ar-Riqqah wa al-Bakā'* [Sensitivity and Crying] by Ibn Abi Dunya, no. 425.

(2) *Siyar A'lām an-Nubalā'* [The Lives of Noble Figures] (5/114).

enormous impact on his temperament, his sense of faith and his spiritual adherence in making the eminent and intellectual person 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz became.⁽¹⁾

His Learning at the Hands of al-Madīnah's Senior Fuqahā' (Jurists) and Scholars:

'Umar's father, 'Abd al-'Aziz, entrusted him to the care of Ṣāliḥ bin Kīṣān who was one of the most learned and pious men of al-Madīnah. 'Umar received his education under the supervision of Ṣāliḥ, who was very particular about his role in disciplining 'Umar. For instance, he made it incumbent upon 'Umar to pray every prayer with the congregation in the *masjid* (mosque), but when 'Umar turned up late one day, the congregation informed Ṣāliḥ who questioned him about it, asking: "What business were you engaged in?" 'Umar replied: "I was sorting out my hair", to which Ṣāliḥ remarked: "You love yourself that much that you would let it influence your prayers?!" He immediately wrote to 'Abd al-'Azīz informing him about it, at which instant his father sent a delegate to 'Umar who was instructed to not speak a word before shaving his son's head completely.⁽²⁾ From then on, 'Umar desired to imitate the manner in which the Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prayed: ardently and meticulously. In keeping with that, he would prolong his bowing and prostrating and lighten his standing and sitting,

(1) *Al-Jawānib at-Tarbawīyah fi Hayāt 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Educational Aspects in the Life of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz], p. 23.

(2) *Al-Bidāyah wa an-Nihāyah* [The Beginning and the End] (12/678).

death was seven hundred *Dīnār*, which covered the cost of his shroud, which was five *Dīnār* and the plot of land for his grave which was two *Dīnār*, after which the remainder was split between his sons, meaning that they each received a share of nineteen *dirham*. On the other hand, Hishām bin 'Abd al-Mālik died also leaving behind eleven sons and to each of them he bequeathed a million *Dīnār*. Nevertheless, it was but a few years on that I saw one of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz's sons donate one hundred horses for the sake of Allāh in one day, whilst people were said to have witnessed one of Hishām bin 'Abd al-Mālik's sons receive charity."⁽¹⁾ The above narrations clearly show us that even though 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz received a large inheritance from his father, it diminished to nothing by the time of his death (may Allāh have mercy in him and be pleased with him).⁽²⁾

(1) *Sīrat 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Life of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz] by Ibn al-Jawzi, p. 338; *Fiqh 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Jurisprudence of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz] (124/).

(2) *Fiqh 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Jurisprudence of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz] (156/).

The People's Commemoration of Him after His Death:

Maslamah bin 'Abd al-Mālik's Eulogy:

When 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz died, Maslamah looked at him while he was lying in his burial shroud and said: "May Allāh have mercy on you! You have softened our hard hearts and kept us mindful of being righteous."⁽¹⁾

Fāṭimah bint 'Abd al-Mālik's Eulogy:

Wabīb bin al-Warad is reported to have said: "We were told that when 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz died, some jurists went to his wife to pay their condolences to her, saying: "We have come to offer condolences to you over 'Umar. Your affliction is one shared by the *Ummah*, so could you tell us something about him (may Allāh have mercy on him)? What was he like when he was at home, as a man's family know him best?" She replied: "By Allāh, he did not pray or fast more than anyone else but, by Allāh, I never saw anyone more fearful of Allāh than 'Umar. Sometimes he used to lie in my bed where one should enjoy his pleasure with his wife but instead he

(1) *Sīrat 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz* [The Life of 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Azīz] by Ibn al-Jawzi, p. 329.